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AUTHOR Johnson, Josephine
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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Western Illinois University's Enrollment Management plan designed to reverse a serious declining enrollment pattern from the late 1970s. The plan was implemented in 1984 and encouraged a total university commitment to enrollment management. Some of the highlights of the program in its first 2 years are: expansion of the Honors Program; development of a comprehensive marketing plan; upgrading of the financial aid process; expansion of academic assistance via Learning Assistance Centers and help sessions; faculty development programming; and establishment of an Admissions Clearinghouse to respond to inquiries within a 24-hour period. This program produced immediate results, with the fall 1986 semester enrollment exceeding the 12,000 student total for the first time since 1982. Total headcount enrollments increased by 1.9% from 1985, with on-campus enrollments up 3.8%. New freshmen for fall 1986 increased 2.8%, and graduate enrollments showed significant gain. Extension undergraduate enrollments increased at all levels. The university also experienced a rise in the academic quality of freshmen enrollees. Overall enrollments have continued to grow due to improved recruitment efforts and retention rates. Between 1984 and 1987, the freshmen to sophomore retention rates increased from 66% to 71% with impressive improved retention rates for minority students.
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ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT: A CAMPUS RESPONSE

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Dr. Josephine Johnson
Vice President for Public Affairs and Development

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- o To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- o To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- o To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- o To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

In an effort to reverse a serious declinational enrollment pattern, Western Illinois University developed an Enrollment Management plan. The basis for the model was established by the Council on Enrollment Management, a group with broad representation which prepared a comprehensive set of recommendations for policy, procedural and functional changes. Response strategies included the formulation of a systematic research program, a change in admissions standards, preparation of a marketing plan, an emphasis on "The Freshman Year," the expansion of learning assistance activities and the enhancement of the Honors Program. This collective, university-wide effort has led to a reversal in the enrollment trend.

INTRODUCTION

During 1984, Western Illinois University developed and began to implement a strategy of enrollment management to reverse substantial enrollment declines that had begun in the late 1970's and continued into the 1980's. After reviewing the existing literature on enrollment management, sending several staff to workshops on enrollment management, bringing several consultants on enrollment management to campus, and conducting an analysis of recognized projects at several state universities, Western Illinois University began to develop a systematic program of enrollment management. The key to the success of the plan was based on developing total University commitment to enrollment management, with broad participation in the development and implementation of the plan. What follows outlines the development and implementation process, as well as the results of the enrollment management effort.

BACKGROUND

During the late 1970's and early 1980's Western Illinois University experienced a serious decline in on-campus and extension enrollments. Specifically, headcount enrollment declined 20 percent, from 14,744 in the Fall of 1976 to 11,750 in the Fall of 1984. Such decline not only threatened the viability of several academic programs but also jeopardized the funding base of the University.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

This drastic decline in enrollments led to the establishment of a Council on Enrollment Management, with representatives from the administration, faculty, staff, and student body. The Council, using five operational sub-committees--Academic Excellence, Admissions Counseling, Extra-Curricular Activities and Student Organization, Public Relations/Communications, and Student Services--provided the University with a comprehensive set of recommendations for policy, procedural and functional changes considered essential to reverse the negative enrollment trend.

The recommendations were predicated on four basic principles:

1. Enrollment management must be a collective, university-wide effort dedicated to academic excellence, quality teaching and advising, and strong support services. Thus, the total campus would assume responsibility for developing enrollment management strategies and for addressing responses to environmental forces having an adverse impact on institutional growth and vitality.
2. Ongoing data collection, interpretation, and dissemination would be viewed as foundational and critical components in the enrollment management plan.

3. Aggressive recruitment of well-qualified students, based on a carefully developed marketing plan congruent with the University's mission, would result in a reversal of enrollment deceleration.
4. Retention, the enrollment management area over which the institution could exert significant control, would begin with the admissions process. Attrition difficulties, partially viewed as academic and social climate problems, needed to be examined holistically as well as for subgroups in the total student population.

In December 1984, following the recommendation of the Council on Enrollment Management and other campus groups, an Executive Assistant to the President for Enrollment Management (EA-EM) was named. Through the new position, one professional was given the responsibility for the overall coordination of enrollment management approaches selected by the representative campus group to reverse the declining campus population trend. While actively monitoring the recruitment and retention strategies and activities, the EA-EM had an opportunity to assess and address barriers to change and to bring additional campus attention to image enhancement, demographic data, creative marketing approaches, and Western's attrition characteristics.

Essential to planning, program modification and change has been the establishment, through the Office of Institutional Research, of a systematic research program related to enrollment management. By using baseline statistical data, attitudinal research, retention studies, alumni surveys, cohort studies, and a longitudinal research plan, the University became positioned to learn more about itself, the effectiveness of its programs and support services and its impact on potential, currently enrolled, and former students. Other efforts involved market studies conducted by the Office of Admissions, the use of exit interviews, and a student feedback system in all high-usage student support service areas.

Highlights of the program in its first two years included:

1. A review of admissions standards by the Faculty Senate and the Council on Admissions, Graduation and Academic Standards resulting in the institution of more demanding standards for acceptance to the University.
2. Development of a comprehensive marketing plan, "The Western Advantage," used by the Admissions Office in its recruitment efforts.
3. Emphasis on "The Freshman Year" included the establishment of an expanded orientation (student and parent) advising and registration program for incoming students, a two-day orientation program prior to the opening of school, and the introduction of an eight-week, one-credit orientation course for freshman.
4. Increased attention to enhancing the academic advising process through in-service training, restructuring of college advising programs, and student satisfaction feedback methods.
5. Expansion of the Honors Program.

6. Establishment of a Scholarship Program for students with high ACT's and class rank.
7. Upgrading the financial aid process.
8. Expansion of academic assistance through Learning Assistance Centers and the help sessions available for all basic curriculum courses offered through the College of Arts and Sciences.
9. Faculty Development programming designed to improve classroom instruction and academic advising, and to sensitize faculty to the special needs of minorities and non-traditional students.
10. Identification and positive response by the School of Continuing Education to previously untapped markets and populations.
11. The development of a campus retention program which includes an Early Warning System, a two-year departmental and college accountability plan, a Residence Hall Retention activity timeline, and a sorority and fraternity goal-setting and monitoring system.
12. Establishment of an Admissions Clearing House with the goal of responding to inquiries within a 24-hour period.

RESULTS

The program on enrollment management produced immediate results. During the Fall Semester of 1986, Western Illinois University exceeded the 12,000 student total for the first time since 1982. Total headcount enrollments increased by 1.9 percent from 1985, with on-campus enrollments up 3.8 percent. New freshmen for the Fall 1986 term increased 2.8 percent. Graduate enrollments continued to show a significant gain. Extension undergraduate enrollments increased at all levels, with increases ranging from 51.4 percent at the sophomore level to 2.6 percent at the freshman level.

Not only did the University experience an increase in enrollment numbers during the Fall Semester of 1986 but also in the academic quality of freshman enrollees. The 1986 Fall Semester mean ACT for regularly admitted freshmen was 20.46 compared to 18.62 the previous year. The number of freshmen entering the Honors Program increased 48 percent over the 1985 figures.

Subsequently, overall enrollments have continued to grow. Headcount enrollment has increased from 11,750 in the Fall of 1984 to 12,765 in the Fall of 1988, an 8.6 percent increase. These enrollment increases were not only the result from numerous improvements in the recruitment efforts of the University but also from improved retention rates. Between FY84 and FY87, the freshman to sophomore retention rates increased from 66 to 71 percent. Particularly impressive were the improved retention rates for minority students; freshman to sophomore retention rates for Black students increased from 53 percent in FY85 to 67 percent in FY87. In short, the total

enrollment management plan, based on total institution involvement, produced an upward trend in numbers, a more academically able freshman population, and an improved campus climate.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of Western Illinois University clearly indicates that a successful program of enrollment management requires total university participation in planning and implementation. Such an approach will lead to an enrollment management program that will increase enrollments through both improved recruitment and retention activities. Occurring concomitantly with improved enrollments as a result of better attraction/retention activities was a greater sensitivity to student needs, improved advising, and an improved educational and living environment on campus. More generally, the program led to a greater sensitivity to the overall needs of students.